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SUBJECT: INDONESIAN MPS PRAISE INTL VISITOR PROGRAM, CITE
TROUBLING WAHHABI INFLUENCE AMONG AMERICAN MUSLIMS

This cable is sensitive but unclassified; please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Poloffs recently debriefed four members of the Indonesian House of Representatives who participated in the International Visitor Leadership Program, &The U.S. Political System,8 from August 7) 25, 2006. In their visits to cities and towns throughout the United States, the participants met with a diverse group of Americans and American organizations. The participants stressed that this trip showed them that the real strength of the US is not its government or military, but its people. It is troubling to note, however, that one of the participants, a member of the conservative Muslim Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), felt that many American Muslims seemed ashamed of and embarrassed about their country. He also posited that there seemed to be too much of a Wahhabi influence on the American Muslim community, noting that he was concerned by the level of intolerance and inflexibility he encountered at a mosque in Seattle. End Summary.

¶2. (U) From August 7) 25, 2006, five members of the Indonesian House of Representatives participated in the International Visitor Leadership Program, &The U.S. Political System.8 While in the United States, the participants visited Washington, DC; Rochester, New York; Grand Island, Nebraska; Oklahoma City; and Seattle. During their visit they met with various government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, politicians, and other individuals.

¶3. (U) The visitors agreed that the most interesting parts of their visit were those that occurred outside of Washington, DC, particularly their trips to rural areas and small towns. In fact, they singled out Nebraska several times as the highlight of their visit. They commented that the home hospitality component was wonderful. In Nebraska, the group was especially touched when their hosts held a celebration for Indonesian Independence Day. As a result of these experiences, they feel they have gotten a real sense of the U.S. from ordinary Americans, which they believe is different from the U.S. that is projected by our foreign policy. The real strength of the U.S. is not its government or military, they said, but its people.

¶4. (U) They commented that because they believe it is important for younger Indonesian MPs to understand the United States and how it works, they hoped that in the future more MPs could be sent on the IVLP. They also purchased and brought home bags of U.S. history books and compact discs that they plan to share. They found a number of commonalities between the U.S. and Indonesia that they hoped others would see, notably a history of multiculturalism. One participant is even planning to introduce a curriculum on political participation that he found in the United States

into his Islamic boarding school.

¶5. (U) Although they were not scheduled to visit New York City, the visitors pushed hard to get the partner organization, Delphi International, to permit them to do so that they could visit Ground Zero. While there, the men) who are all Islamists) visited the site to pray.

¶6. (SBU) In commenting on his interactions with American Muslims, one of the Islamist participants commented that American Muslims seemed embarrassed about being Americans, which troubled him. He didn't think that they had any reason to be ashamed, and wanted to tell them that &this is your country and these are your people.8 He also remarked that there seemed to be too much Saudi influence on the American Muslim community, which was particularly noticeable in the Seattle mosque he visited. According to him, the teaching at this mosque was ~ flexible.8 In his view, American Muslims could benefit from more interaction with Indonesian Muslims, who are generally more moderate than Saudis. The participants suggested that there be a sort of reverse IVLP program that would bring Indonesian Muslims on visits with the American Muslim community, and send American Muslims to Indonesia to interact with their counterparts here. PASCOE